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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 129841

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/10/2018
TAGS: KDEM PGOV PHUM SA
SUBJECT: DEMARCHE: PROSPECTS FOR REFORM IN 2009 SAUDI ELECTIONS

REF: STATE1786

Classified By: DRL DAS Erica Barks-Ruggles, reasons 1.4 b and d

¶1. (U) This is an action request. Please see paragraph 3.

¶2. (C) With Saudi Arabia scheduled to appoint a new Majlis al-Shoura in April 2009 and to hold municipal elections in June 2009, the Department is formulating an elections strategy per the framework of post,s democracy strategy. Ahead of these important elections, the Department requests that post inquire about the prospects for reforms with relevant governmental and non-governmental contacts.

¶3. (C) Washington requests that Post provides its analysis on the following issues. As appropriate, Post is requested to solicit input from relevant official and unofficial contacts.

- Women,s suffrage: What are the prospects for women,s suffrage in the 2009 municipal elections? Saudi officials indicated that women were not allowed the right to vote in the 2005 municipal elections primarily due to infrastructure and logistical delays, implying that women,s suffrage might be under consideration for 2009 elections. Is this under discussion? How strong is SAG support for this step? Where does public opinion fall on the issue?

- Female candidates: Municipal Affairs Minister Mitib bin Abdul-Aziz implied after the 2005 elections that women would be allowed to vote and run for municipal office in 2009. Will this happen? What logistical barriers does the Kingdom need to overcome? Again, what is the level of public support for this measure in the eyes of both official and non-official embassy contacts? Can the United States help to prepare female candidates?

- Majlis al-Shoura: What are the prospects for partial or full elections for members of the Majlis al-Shoura, whose appointed terms are slated to end in April 2009? What is the possibility that the SAG will appoint or elect female members? Currently, six women act as advisors to the Majlis al-Shoura on women,s and family matters, but do not have voting rights*will their status change in the new Majlis?

¶4. (U) Post is requested to respond via cable by January ¶28. For questions, please contact Matthew Hickey, DRL/NESCA, 202-647-2051.
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